



# Columbia Nursery

## Planting Guide for Beans, Corn & Peas in USDA Zones 3–5

This guide provides growing instructions, planting timelines, and care tips for three classic garden crops: **beans**, **corn**, and **peas**, specifically tailored for cold-hardy growing zones like Montana.

### General Guidelines

- Soil Temperature:
  - Beans and corn: Minimum 60°F
  - Peas: Can germinate at 40°F
- Frost Sensitivity:
  - Beans and corn: Warm-season, plant after last frost
  - Peas: Cool-season, plant 4–6 weeks before last frost or around St. Patrick’s Day (March 17) if soil is workable
- Sunlight: Full sun (6+ hours/day)
- Soil: Well-drained, enriched with compost or aged manure. Traditional additions like fish heads can offer nitrogen boosts.

### Estimated Planting Dates by Zone

Crop	Zone 3	Zone 4	Zone 5
Beans	June 1–10	May 20–30	May 10–20
Corn	June 1–15 (or start indoors early May)	May 20–30	May 10–20
Peas	April 15–25	April 1–10	March 17–30

### Beans

- Types: Bush, pole, snap, shell, dry, and even soybeans for soy-based foods
- Spacing:
  - Bush: 2" apart in rows 18–24" apart
  - Pole: 4" apart at base of trellis or teepee
- Depth: 1"
- Support: Provide stakes or netting for pole varieties
- Harvest: 50–60 days for snap beans; 90+ days for dry beans

#### Tips:

- Soak seeds overnight in bacterial inoculant to promote nitrogen fixing in root nodules
- Beans can also be started indoors a few weeks early, then transplanted



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- Great choice for container gardening (minimum 12" deep and wide for 3–4 plants)
- Pole beans will continue producing if harvested regularly; bush beans tend to yield one main crop
- For dry beans, let pods dry on the plant, or pull and hang entire plant if rain threatens

## Corn

- Types: Sweet corn, popcorn, dent
- Spacing: 8–12" apart in blocks (not rows) to promote pollination
- Depth: 1.5–2"
- Fertilizer: Heavy feeder; side-dress with nitrogen when plants are 8" tall, or use fish fertilizer
- Harvest: 65–90 days depending on variety; ready when silks begin to brown

### Tips:

- In Zone 3 or cooler climates, start indoors in peat pots 3–4 weeks before last frost to gain a head start
- Not suited for container growing—requires too much space for worthwhile yield
- Avoid shading nearby sun-loving crops
- Corn can cross-pollinate easily—avoid planting multiple sweet corn types or near field corn
- Choose open-pollinated seed if saving seed is a goal
- Fun fact: modern sweet corn evolved from radiation experiments—seed-saving scientists made it possible!

## Peas

- Types: Shelling, snap, snow
- Spacing: 1–2" apart in rows 18–24" apart
- Depth: 1"
- Support: Trellis, fence, or string support for climbing varieties
- Harvest: 55–70 days depending on type

### Tips:

- Plant early—peas love Montana’s cool springs and perform best before summer heat
- Soak seeds in inoculant to boost germination and nitrogen fixation
- Mulch keeps soil cool and moist; top-dress with fertilizer when vines are ~1 foot tall
- Grow well in containers at least 12" deep and wide
- Stop producing in hot weather; this is normal
- Shelling peas are harvested for interior seeds; snap peas are eaten whole when young

## Companion Planting Notes

Crop	Good Companions	Avoid Planting Near
Beans	Corn, squash, carrots	Onions, garlic



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Corn	Beans, squash, cucumbers	Tomatoes
Peas	Carrots, radishes, spinach	Onions, garlic

## Quick Tips for Zones 3–5

- Raised beds and black plastic help warm soil early in short-season zones
- Choose short-season or cold-hardy varieties when possible
- Water deeply during dry spells, especially in sandy soils
- Mulch to suppress weeds and conserve moisture
- Always read seed packets carefully—especially for pea varieties and quantity needs

Gardening in cold climates may come with challenges, but fresh-picked beans, corn, and peas are well worth the effort—and will spoil you for store-bought produce!